(c) the steps taken by Government to withdraw upper ceiling on payment of bonus ?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRISHARAD YAD AV) : (a) to (c) The Payment of Bonus Act was enacted in 1965. Originally the Act provided for an eligibility limit of Rs. 1600 p.m. of wages and calculation ceiling of Rs. 750 p.m. which were raised to Rs. 2500 and Rs. 1600 respectively in 1985 (w.e.f. 7-11-85). The ceilings were subsequently raised to Rs. 3500 and Rs. 2500 respectively in 1995, effective 1 -4-93. The Consumer Price Index Numbers for Industrial Workers (base 1960 = 100) for the year 1965 was 132 and for 1985, it was 625. The index as on 1 -4-93 with new CPI base (1982) was 243 which when converted to 1960 base comes to 1198. The latest CPI at 1982 base is 468 for the month of October, 2001 which works out to 2307 at 1960 base.

The Government is seized of the demand regarding the amendment of Payment of Bonus Act, 1965 for raising the eligibility and calculation ceilings. The issue is under examination in the light of its wide ranging repercussions as the benefits of bonus will have to be extended to, besides the Private Sector, to the employees of PSUs (both Central and States), Central and State Governments and autonomous organizations resulting in huge financial burden to the Government exchequer.

New passport offices in North-Eastern States

*349. SHRIMATIB ASANTl S ARMA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government propose to open new passport offices and collection centres in Assam and other North-Eastem States;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

It is the endeavour of the Government to extend passport issue facilities to every State of India. The Government has decided to extend the facility of issuance of passports at the capitals of the North-Eastem States.. However, since the volume of applications from the North-Eastem States (except Assam) is very low, it is proposed to authorize the concerned State Governments for issuance of passports.

It has been decided to extend the facility of collection of passport applications through Speed Post Centres to the North-Eastem States also. Besides, all the States including the States in the North-Eastem region have been asked to start collecting passport applications at a designated office at district level.

(c) Does not arise.

Sick units in Ibe country

†*350. SHRIRAMJETHMALANI :

SHRIRAJIVRANJAN SINGH 'LALAN':

Will the Minister of SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that sickness is increasing continuously in the small scale industries in the country;

(b) if so, the number of sick industries in the country during 1998-1999, 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, State-wise;

(c) the percentage of sick industries to the number of small scale industries; and

(d) the industries with maximum and minimum level of sickness, State-wise ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES (SHRDMATIVASUNDHARA RATE) : (a) and (b) No, Sir. As per the latest data compiled by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the number of Sick Small Scale Industries (SSI) has decreased from 306221 as at the end of March, 1999 to 304235 at the end of March, 2000. The State-wise data on sick small scale industries is given in the Statement. *(See* below).

(c) The percentage of sick SSI units to total SSI units as at the end of March, 2000 works out to 9.5%.

(d) As per the information compiled by the RBL the maximum number of sick SSI units was in textile sector and the minimum in gem and jewellery sector at the end of March, 2000 in the country. The data on industry-wise sick SSI units in different states are not compiled by the RBI.

†Origiiial notice of the question was received in Hindi.